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Finding God and Being Surprised

By Maggie MacKenzie

Having gone to Catholic school my entire life I often took my faith and religion for granted. I always knew it was a part of me, as I was continually taught, but I did not always understand it and rarely placed much trust in my God. This, thankfully, changed as I matured and went through certain circumstances that made me actually want to turn to my faith for answers and guidance. I credit much of this change to my religion class during my sophomore year at Fairfield University.

I originally took this class to fulfill my core requirement and for the three credits it promised, nothing more. It was titled “Finding God in All Things.” After receiving the syllabus, I noticed a certain assignment that was quite different from anything I had ever been assigned before and, to be honest, I was less than thrilled with the time it required from my busy schedule. This assignment was titled “Spiritual Exercises” and required each student to meet with a spiritual counselor once a week to discuss certain faith-filled readings and to write a 10-page reflection paper about our experience with these meetings. Although I was at first skeptical and weary of this task, I dutifully met with my counselor every week.

My spiritual advisor's name was Patricia Brennan, and she truly changed my life. She was kind, patient, and generous, among many other wonderful things. She simply cannot be properly described—that is how amazing I think she is.

I was hesitant and timid to open up to her at first, but she never pushed nor pried information out of me. She simply let me decide when that time would be. We first talked only about the religious passages that were assigned because I was still getting used to the idea of having a spiritual advisor.

But as the weeks went on, I found myself looking forward to our meetings and actually, for the first time, excited to talk about the religion I have been practicing and learning about my entire life. I read the biblical passages she assigned me and found myself fully understanding what they meant. I found comfort in the readings and relied on them when things were tough. It was also wonderful because I took these religious teachings to heart and was able to create a bridge between my faith and the rest of my life; my relationship with God was slowly becoming more and more important too. It was, for the first time, becoming a vital part of my day-to-day activities

and this was completely my choice. Patricia just guided me.

Two years later I am grateful that my 19-year-old self decided to take “Finding God in All Things” and that Patricia Brennan was placed in my life. That year was a year of lots of events that tested my strength. The lessons and wisdom that Patricia gave me changed my life. She gave me the tools to understand, practice, and appreciate my faith.

I wish that everyone were able to have a “Spiritual Exercise” assignment. In a way it was amazing to have one hour a week dedicated to my religion and to strengthening my faith in God. I have never had an assignment leave as big of an impact as this one. Even two years later I am still grateful for it. It taught me that it is okay to question, study, practice, and lean on my faith. As a senior ready to graduate and transition into the next stage of my life, I will not only cherish my meetings with Patricia, but I will put to practice all that she taught me about myself and my religion. For that I will forever be in debt to her. I look forward to repaying her. ■

Maggie McKenzie is a senior at Fairfield University.